

December 9, 2009

Dan Ruben
Executive Director of Equal Justice America
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I want to sincerely thank you for helping me fund my summer fellowship at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF). I can honestly say that my time at LAF has changed me profoundly. I have grown not only as a law student and future attorney, but more importantly I feel that I have grown as a human being. The stories and challenges of many of the clients that I worked with became my inspiration to continue working in public interest and continue doing the kind of work I was able to do at LAF.

One of the cases I worked on was the case of a family that had lived through the trauma of a sexual assault. The mother of this family is a courageous woman who had been raising four children, the oldest with a learning disability. It was this oldest daughter who also faced the brutal sexual assault by one of her neighbors. The family was here in the United States undocumented and though the person that assaulted the daughter had been bothering them for a while, the mother was afraid of asking the police for help. She feared this man not only because she believes he was a member of a gang, but she also feared that informing authorities would cause her trouble because of her immigration status. Unfortunately, it would not be until the mother walked into her daughter's room, saw a broken window and two men sexually assaulting her daughter that she finally had the courage to seek help from the police. Her daughter had been raped and the entire family had witnessed part of the incident and had suffered great emotional distress because of it. Ironically, it would be this unfortunate incident and the family's cooperation with law enforcement officials that would make them eligible to adjust their immigration status. The U visa, a relatively new visa, allows crime victims who cooperate with U.S. law enforcement officials to petition for a visa that allows them to gain lawful status in the country. I was able to work with this family in gathering documents and writing affidavits to support their petition for a U visa. Hearing the story, particularly from the mother's perspective was emotionally very difficult for me. Even though months had passed since the incident it was clear that the family was still coping with what had happened. The mother would tell her story with such emotion and at times rage for what had happened. Sometimes those sentiments would extent to a feeling of despair and a feeling of hopelessness that this world was a rotting place and nothing could be done about it. After sitting with her for a couple of hours—at time just being silent in the room with her because I knew that no matter what I said I could not lessen the pain that she felt—we finally reached a point were I think she felt hope. There was at least hope, hope that what had happened would help the entire family gain status and live in the United States without fear. Live in the U.S. with opportunities to make a better life for herself and her children. I finished the interview with the mother, wished her well and told her that I would prepare the application and all the documents as soon as possible so that we could send her application. The

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application was sent, but at the time I finished my fellowship we had not yet heard whether the government had approved it.

It was cases like the one that I described above that made me realize that the kind of work I was doing at LAF is the kind of work I want to continue to do. At the end of my fellowship I sat down with my supervising attorney and she described it to me as becoming addicted to a feeling of having the power to change someone's life. Although sometimes we associate an addiction with power as something negative, I think this kind of addiction—if we can call it that—is a good thing. I value people that dedicate their lives to help others and I have realized over the summer that I too want to do everything I can to help others.

Sincerely,

Rocío Alcántar
DePaul College of Law
Class of 2010